Beyond the University Gates:

Provision of Extended Curriculum Programmes in South Africa

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Introduction

The Rhodes University Foundation Seminar was planned at HELTASA in 2008 by Professor Chrissie Boughey and a group of HELTASA members with interest and experience in foundation curriculum. Academic literacy and the associated theme of access and success at university, digital literacy and different models of foundation at universities of technology were identified as key themes. A group of academics was then invited to present seminar papers on these critical aspects of the foundation curriculum which would be used as the basis for critical discussion of foundation provision with foundation representatives from all the universities. It was decided that the seminars should be written up as short papers as a resource for the delegates and for other foundation staff who did not attend the seminar.

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A 'critical' imperative?

Chrissie Boughey, Rhodes University

Introduction

South African Academic Development practitioners have been working at foundation level for nearly thirty years. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Boughey, 2007), the majority of early initiatives intended to provide support to students located the problem of 'underpreparedness' in students themselves – black students, it was argued, lacked the skills, the conceptual background and the language proficiency necessary to succeed at tertiary level. Consonant with the location of 'underpreparedness' in students, early initiatives then worked *on* the students by providing additional classes and tutorials intended to make up for the deficiencies that students were thought to bring with them to university.

By the mid 1980s, a number of scholars began to challenge this understanding of 'underpreparedness' by pointing out that the 'problem' lay not in the students, but rather in the institutions to which those students had been admitted (Boughey, *ibid*). In an article published in the first AD journal, *ASPects,* in 1985, for example, Vilakazi and Tema were arguing that:

> … the assumption held by the average academic and administrator of a white university in this country is that the increasing admission of blacks into their student body gives rise to a problem. This is correct. However, we insist that the diagnosis of the problem widely accepted in white universities is largely incorrect. Our greatest, most fundamental error, is the assumption held, stated or unstated, that the problem is first and foremost with the black student, or with most black students (p.19).

These challenges to what were, at the time, dominant understandings of 'underpreparedness' lay in what is termed a 'critical' orientation to research and, thus, to 'knowing'. In the late 1980s, practitioners took up the challenge to think about 'underpreparedness' in a different way and increasingly began to produce work which was located in this critical orientation (see Boughey, 2005, for a review of this work). This shift in thinking also heralded a shift in name and a field which had, until that time, been known as 'Academic Support' began to be named 'Academic Develoment'.

Thirty years on, and largely as a result of the instability which characterized the field of in the late 1990s (see, Boughey, 2007, for further explanation), the potential of work located in a critical orientation to change the way we think about our students and the way they experience learning at tertiary level remains largely unfulfilled as a large number of practitioners continue to focus their attention on students' perceived 'deficiencies', however sympathetically these may be described and regardless of the reasons to which they are attributed. This is not to say that Academic Development practitioners in other areas have abandoned work located in a critical orientation, as some of the best research in the field (where 'best' is defined, however problematically, by the fact that it has been published in prestigious, peer reviewed international journals) draws on critical social theory. The instability in the field mentioned earlier, however, has meant that it has been very difficult to build a cadre of experienced practitioners. As new practitioners have entered, and continue to enter, the field (particularly as Department of Education funding has become available for foundation work in Extended Programmes), they have tended to draw on the understandings of 'underpreparedness' which were prevalent in the early 1980s and which continue to 'make sense' today to those who have not been introduced to critical social theory.

The 2009 Foundation Studies Seminar held at Rhodes University was intended to try to make up for some of the losses experienced due to instability in the field of Academic Development by introducing some critical thinking to those involved in running the foundation phase of Extended Programmes at universities across the country. This article is intended to describe some of the ideas introduced during the Seminar and, in doing so, to contribute to a discussion on the way 'critical' orientations to knowing can contribute to knowledge and practice within the field of Academic Development.

'Critical' Orientations to Knowing

As Carspecken (1996) points out, a 'critical' orientation to knowing is not linked with any one research methodology but rather involves a concern with social justice and power. 'Critical' research can therefore take a wide variety of forms because it is the *orientation* which is critical and not the research methodology itself.

The origins of critical orientations are usually attributed to the 'Frankfurt School' – a group of German philosophers (Horkheimer, Adorno & Marcuse) who were working in Frankfurt in the 1930s. The Frankfurt School drew on Marxist theory and more specifically on the idea that the structures of society (and education is one such structure) are determined by relations in the economic system which is prevalent at the time. The forms the structures take emerge from these relations and then work to reproduce that same system. In the context of capitalism, then, the structure of education would need to produce a small number of capitalists and a large number of workers who would not be trained to criticize the economic system and would simply live (and work) to serve it.

Also key to critical orientations to knowing is the idea that we can be seduced into thinking that a lot of what we believe is simply 'commonsense'. Gramsci (1891-1937), coined the idea of 'hegemony' to signify the way dominant ways of thinking and being may become 'commonsense' to us with the result that they are never questioned (Gramsci, 1971). When these dominant ways of thinking and being are hegemonic then we are trapped by them and cannot work to make the world a more just place. *Critical* examination and interrogation of the schooling and education systems (i.e. of the 'structures' in society) aim to free ourselves from hegemony so that we come to see how schooling and education serve to disadvantage some and privilege others in ways which are not always overt.

More recently, critical orientations to knowing have come to rely on the construct of discourse. Kress (1989:7) defines discourses as:

> ... systematically organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that, they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension – what it is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally.

In relation to education, when we talk about students or the curriculum or assessment, we are involved in discourse and our talk structures what it is possible to do or not to do in the way of education.

We cannot talk about education without involving ourselves in discourse just as we cannot walk into a school or other institution without involving ourselves in discourse. The way a teaching space is organized (with rows of tables facing the lecturer/tutor with tables allowing students to sit in groups) is both indicative of discourse and constitutive of it. When we arrange the tables in rows, we do so because of a discourse or a set of discourses which constructs learning as listening to the

lecturer/tutor and teaching as instructing (lecturing) students. As we arrange the tables, we re-affirm and reproduce the discourse.

Crucial to critical orientations is the idea that the way structures such as education (and other structures might include the family, the law, medicine, gender, race and so on) *appear* to be fair. In the case of education, for example, the idea that success is dependent on factors (such as intelligence, motivation, aptitude, language ability and so on as defined by institutional discourse) *inherent to the individual* makes it 'easier' to explain why some fail and why some succeed. If a student enters higher education without the necessary 'intelligence' (and there is a lot of research which questions, for example, the idea of the 'intelligence quotient' or 'IQ') and that student fails, then it is possible to resolve the system from blame since the reason for their failing was located outside the system and in the individual themself. In South Africa, the idea of 'disadvantage' and 'disadvantaged schooling' works in this way. Black students, it is argued, enter higher education with various 'deficiencies' because of the continuing poor performance of the school system (although some people, even in the field of Academic Development, continue to cite factors inherent to the individual alone, such as 'aptitude'). Locating problems in this way then provides a reason for us *not* to look at the higher education system (and teaching and learning and curriculum practices within that system) to see how and why the system itself could be perpetuating 'structural disadvantage'.

What does this mean for foundation level work?

Some of the implications of critical ways of knowing for foundation level work have already been mentioned. The idea that success in education is dependent on factors inherent to the individual such as intelligence, motivation and aptitude may appear to be commonsense. When these constructs are interrogated, however, we can come to see how other *structural* factors might be involved in denying success to some groups of students. How does the way we teach and assess privilege some and disadvantage others? How does the way institutions are organized privilege some and disadvantage others?

Other implications arise in relation to the way we work. Is foundation level work sufficient to allow students to succeed or are changes in 'mainstream' teaching and learning and curriculum necessary? When we try to innovate and make changes, what sort of thinking is behind those changes? Are we still locating the 'problem' in the individual (and, thus, trying to change them) or are we understanding the way the system works in relation to that individual?

In many respects, critical orientations to knowing can involve 'unthinking' and 'undoing' things we have done for years. The willingness to engage with the process of unthinking and undoing is itself critical, however, and can be the beginning of a journey which is hugely rewarding for AD practitioners.

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Cracking the code of academic literacy: An ideological task[1]

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Introduction

'Cracking the code' (Ballard and Clanchy, 1988) of academic literacy, be it for the purposes of a first-year essay or for a presentation at a seminar for fellow academics (such as this one), is an essential criterion of success within higher education. If I fail to crack the code and use the appropriate literacy practices, I do not have a 'voice', or at least not one which will be listened to by those adept in the specific literacy practices deemed appropriate in this context. Those fluent in any particular literacy can be thought of as members of a tribe (Becher and Trowler, 2001) with clear expectations of 'wannabe' tribe members, not least of which is some level of proficiency in the tribe's literacy practices. This paper considers this idea in more detail before discussing what the implications might be for students entering higher education.

Joining the tribe

When learners come to the classroom they bring with them literacy practices that may or may not be considered appropriate. The overlap, or lack thereof, between these literacy practices and those expected by the disciplinary tribe to which they are seeking membership, is key to students' chances of success. This overlap, more than any level of motivation and hard work and proficiency in the language of instruction is what, in my view, determines their chances of success.

To clarify my contention: I am saying that intellect, determination and good English[2] all play a role in students' success but the real key to whether a student will pass or fail relates to the literacy practices she brings with her to the University from her school and home environments, and the extent to which these have commonalities with the literacy practices of her chosen discipline. This is an entirely arbitrary situation; she did not choose which literacy practices would be available to her up to the point of university entry. And yet, I contend, that this, more than anything else, will determine whether or not she passes.

Such a student has clearly garnered a level of mastery in a variety of literacy practices when she enters the university. She has had to negotiate her way through the world to this point and take on a range of "ways of being" (Gee, 2000) and their related social practices in order to become the success story she is as she walks into the institution.

Any student who enters higher education in South Africa has already achieved much. With our low participation rates (Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2007), we should celebrate every student who makes it to higher education in South Africa and appreciate their tenacity in reaching us.

In fact, there is further cause for celebration if our student is black. Now we really should cheer as she enters our halls of learning, because the participation rate for black students is 12% (Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2001: 10). The benchmark for countries at a similar level of development is 20%

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[1] Parts of this paper are based on Chapter 1 of my PhD thesis (McKenna, 2004)
[2] In almost all cases, the Medium of Instruction which foundational students face is English. Feel free to replace this language with another where relevant.

(Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2001: 10). Let us go further and assume that she is working class[3], and therefore amongst the most under-represented group in Higher Education internationally (Archer, Hutchings & Ross 2003).

So we are celebrating: She has made it. And she clearly has had to navigate terrain that few of our more privileged students have ever had any experience of. And she has already cracked a number of codes because she brings with her great proficiency in a range of literacies which have served her well thus far (Bernstein 2003).

But her literacies are probably wrong.

The tribe into which she is trying to gain membership does things quite differently. As she stands on the periphery of this new tribe, she finds that they speak differently, they read differently, they behave differently, and she needs to crack this new code pretty sharply if she is going to be allowed to remain even on the periphery. There is a high chance that she will never figure it out. She will keep using literacy practices which are unacceptable in this environment and she will eventually 'get the message' and drop out.

She is no longer a success story. She is now one of our failures; part of the majority: 56% of her cohort will have dropped out with her (Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2007: 12).

Who is to blame?

What on earth are we doing wrong? I acknowledge that we need not shoulder all the blame. Our school system sends us students we can justifiably call 'underprepared'. Our students have massive financial constraints and concerns that make studying extremely difficult. Some of our students live in a world of crime and violence and HIV and Aids. It is easy to shake our heads and point elsewhere to explain away the fact that we continue to graduate a woefully small number of students in regulation time, and that our graduation rates for black students are even lower (Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2001: 16).

However, those of us working in foundational provision do not shake our heads and point elsewhere. We stand at the entrance to the tribal gates and do our best to ensure that the initiation is not so mysterious. We help students on the periphery to comprehend the strange customs and norms which they are to acquire. We make explicit the different value systems underpinning the foreign ways of the various sub-tribes within our tribe, the Engineering tribe, and the Dental Technology tribe and the Fine Arts tribe[4].

This desire to unpack and make explicit our students' target academic literacies is the essential element in our development of meaningful foundational curricula. We take seriously our job of ensuring that students gain epistemological access to higher education alongside physical access (Morrow, 2007).

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[3] Given South Africa's unemployment rate, 'working class' is, no doubt, a misnomer. But I want to use the term here to emphasise how access to higher education is closely tied to class.

[4] Some of us have also become activists within our tribe and have begun to question tribal practices and get into heated debates with established tribe members about the ways things get done in this tribe. We ask: "What purpose exactly do some of these arcane ways have?" and other thorny questions about whose interests are being served and why, just because we have always done things this way, we should continue to do so? This is not to say that most literacy practices are not essential constructs of the ontologies and epistemologies of the tribe but that a few of our practices may, when held up in transparent ways, be found to have little function beyond elitism.

This is not a simple task, however. Generally educators do not have a clear understanding of academic literacy as a concept, much less an understanding of the practices comprising their own disciplines. But the discourses that unconsciously construct each educator's notions of academic literacy have a major impact on their expectations of students. Academics may not be able to point out the norms and practices of their tribe – they are so enculturated, the practices, including literacy practices are accepted as the norm, or commonsense – but what we expect of our students is situated entirely within these very norms and practices. As Johns points out: "We practitioners, and our students, come to classes with theories about what it is to be literate and how literacy is explored. Despite the hidden and sometimes incomplete nature of these theories, they influence how we teach and learn" (1997: 3).

By defining academic literacy as having to do with 'epistemological access to higher education' (Morrow, 2007), academic literacy is seen to be related to specific cultural contexts and associated with the power and ideological relationships at play within those contexts. Academic literacy thus has to do not only with "ways of using language but also the beliefs, attitudes and values of the group" (Gee, 1990). Text producers and interpreters are required to share a significant amount of background knowledge, values and attitudes for successful meaning-making. If our students do not share our background knowledge, values and attitudes, successful meaning-making is impossible. This demands consideration as to how meaning-making happens.

Conflicting ideas about meaning

It can be said that there are two opposing understandings about how meaning is constructed. One understanding is that the rule-bound structure of language captures meaning in pre-determined ways. The meaning is thus determined by the lexicon and syntax forming the spoken or written (or signed) text. The meaning is 'in the text' which is therefore autonomous of the context in which it is produced or interpreted. This is probably the most common, everyday understanding of how meaning is created.

This belief that literacy is a neutral ability involving the decoding and encoding of script is the basis of a powerful discourse known as "language as an instrument of communication" (Christie, 1993), which reinforces certain teaching methods and rationalises student failures. This is because this pervasive discourse holds that accessing meaning is solely dependent on students' language proficiency in the medium of instruction and their reading/ writing/ listening/ speaking skills.

In contrast to this autonomous model is an understanding of meaning construction as being determined by the knowledge which the creator and interpreter bring with them to the text. While this includes knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures, it also depends on contextual and personal knowledge that the speaker/ writer/ signer/ listener/ reader/ interpreter brings to the text. This ideological model (Street, 1984, 1993, 1995, 1996) holds that texts are constructed within particular socio-cultural contexts and the acquisition of the literacy which gives rise to any particular text is dependent on the acquisition of the underpinning values. Texts are perceived by Fairclough (1992) as social systems in institutional and cultural groups embodying a complex arrangement of power relations.

These two different understandings about meaning-making have major implications for higher education, implications that should be of prime interest to us in considering foundational provision. These are discussed below.

The narrow confines of the Autonomous Model

Where meaning construction is understood to rest on language proficiency, students can be held individually responsible for all problems encountered in attaining shared meaning in the classroom. A student has to learn how to decode and encode messages better so that she can uncover the message trapped in the text. The university may provide opportunities for students to improve their language proficiency through add-on language tutorials, but ultimately the student's ability to construct knowledge in the mainstream classroom is seen to be vested entirely within herself. The literacy of the class is seen as neutral and value free. Language is simply used as the conveyor of subject content. The literacy is believed to be available to all, independent of values, attitudes and norms. One pictorial depiction of this autonomous understanding, the conductor-message-interpreter model, is taught to this day in many Communication classes. The problem with the model is that it leads to an emphasis on students' ability to reach the same interpretation of texts as intended by the text writer or the educator, as if the message was neutrally 'contained' inside the text waiting for decoding. It neglects the reality that the interpretation of the text is *con*text dependent: *who* the reader and writer are (authority or student, for example) and *where* the text is (a set of lecture notes handed out in class by the Engineering lecturer, for example) determine the meaning that is constructed.

Academic texts are often held to be autonomous texts as they supposedly report facts in decontextualised, fairly formulaic constructions. The specialised use of written academic language is held as an ideal for literacy generally and occupies a socially elevated position. Similar forms of literacy are taught in middle class schools (Heath, 1983, Scollon & Scollon, 1995) and literacies other than these privileged forms are not considered to be 'alternative literacies' but are simply regarded as 'wrong'. For children from homes and schools where dominant forms of literacy are not practised, learning at University requires more than the ability to decode and encode texts but also the development of the shared understandings implicit within the 'decontextualised' texts of the university.

Geisler (1994: 26) warns us not to underestimate the power of the autonomous model because it is a "driving myth", and it is my contention that it is a myth which underpins much foundational provision in South Africa. Where there is this misperception that literacy is a neutral set of skills that can be taught, there is usually a strong call for add-on language classes at Foundation level. The term 'academic literacy' is often appropriated and colonized in South African curricula as the 'politically correct' term for such classes, even where such classes focus on generic technical skills and not at all on discipline specific literacies and underpinning value systems.

The autonomous model fails to address the relationship between formal literacies of educational institutions and the power structures within these institutions and society in general. It is able to get away with this by constructing literacies as neutral. This ignores the complex interplay between text construction and power distribution.

The 'common sense' status of dominant literacies allows true interests and injustices to be concealed. The attitudes, values and norms embodied within the socially prestigious forms of literacy are seen to be neutral and apolitical and therefore above question[5]. But we need to question the 'common sense' nature of academic literacies (and academic writing in particular) and see how this excludes people who are not familiar with it. As De Kadt and Mathonsi (2003) show, the literacy practices expected of students are often fraught with issues of identity. Assumptions that language expectations are

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[5] A simple illustration of this can be seen in this excerpt from a B.Tech Research Proposal writing manual: "You must write in third person because this is the correct way to write academically".

context-free and neutral allow us to ignore the issues of power inherent in the literacy practices expected by the university.

The autonomous model influences not only our teaching but also our research. It has resulted in most research within literacy studies being at the level of evaluating approaches designed to develop technical skills. In developing an agenda for research into teaching and learning at Foundation level we must be wary of undertaking research that is at a 'Tips for Teachers' level, comprising evaluations of interventions set up to 'fix' students' inability to use 'language' properly. Such research ignores debates about how literacies are socially constructed and how dominant literacies are privileged. The autonomous model constructs literacy as a technical ability to decode and encode text and this allows our research to be seen as objective and politically neutral.

The social context of the Ideological Model

If literacy is understood as a neutral set of skills, educational research legitimately evaluates the best techniques for developing these skills. However, the idea that there can ever be context-free writing, even in the academic arena, has been challenged by a number of researchers (for example Clark and Ivaniç, 1997; Geisler, 1994; Street, 1995; Jacobs, 2005, 2007). Most literacy researchers now acknowledge that all writing is embedded in and dependent on the direct social context in which it is written as well as the wider cultural context. And when literacy is seen to be a set of social practices, each of which is embedded in a specific context and underpinned by social values, then it is no longer possible to separate a literacy from the people who use it.

The ideological model indicates how activities relating to language are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural contexts in which they occur. The idea that literacy is a unitary phenomenon is thus replaced by an understanding of the multiplicity of the varieties of literacy. A higher education discipline's literacy is thus not a context-free explanation of truths, but a set of discourses determined by the context of situation and culture (Halliday and Hasan, 1989). Content is socially constructed by the discipline's members and "intimately related to the rhetorical processes underlying the reading and writing of texts" (Geisler, 1994: 211). If knowledge is understood as something that is constructed, then domain content is seen to interplay with the rhetorical processes of that discipline. Ballard and Clanchy (1988) indicate that the rules and conventions that define the construction of knowledge have to be understood because the texts, which embody an institution's knowledge, do so within these rules and conventions. The participants in any social act base their actions on certain practices that are taken for granted as rules of conduct by the social group to which they belong. Difficulties arise when the writer and reader share few understandings about how texts are constructed and what it is that they are meant to do in that context.

Researching literacies therefore involves seeking an understanding of the groups and institutions that socialise people into their specific literacy practices. In our case, this means understanding our universities and the academic disciplines within them as communities requiring certain literacy practices of their members. The focus of educational research within this ideological understanding is thus on how academic literacy is constructed by educators and how students respond to the various discourses that construct it in this way. Such research reflects the ideological model's concern with how individuals relate to society by focusing on the concept of ideology and particularly on the way in which ideology is often perceived as 'common sense'.

Further implications of the Ideological Model of meaning making

Gee describes the relationship between working within an ideological model and bringing about social change. Researching the dominant language practices (of a particular academic discipline, for

example) and understanding the ideological foundations thereof "can protect all of us from harming others and from being harmed … because it is the very foundation of resistance and growth" (1990: 192). Dominant literacies are those that are used by people who hold an elevated status in society, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers and academics. Powerful literacies are thus unequally distributed along lines of economic privilege and disempowerment.

The consideration of how students' home literacies interface with the academic literacy norms of higher education enables us to question the extent to which higher education is accessible to all South Africans. The interaction between student identity and academic writing raises the issue of power relations in the process of academic literacy acquisition (Lea and Street, 1998; Thesen, 1997; De Kadt and Mathonsi, 2003; McKenna, 2004).

Academic literacies encompass epistemological and ontological norms too. Academic literacy embodies the very norms of behaviour in higher education, the things that each discipline values and the behaviours it does not. In order to gain access to the academic literacy of their discipline, the student has to 'invent' the expectations within the lecturer's mind. "The student has to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (Bartholomae, 1985:134). But our peculiar ways are rarely made overt in the classroom, despite the need for students to acquire them if they are to succeed in the discipline.

Educators at Foundation level, I would argue, need to consider academic literacy from the perspective of a set of cultural understandings to which students are expected to conform. These understandings encompass more than just the structural and textual conventions of any particular academic discipline and include definitions of what counts as knowledge in the discipline, how such knowledge is constructed and how it can be talked or written about (Boughey & Van Rensberg, 1993: 24).

Academic language is often described in discrete linguistic terms, rather than on a broader discourse-level. Academic literacy can certainly be seen to include the level of basic language skills but there is also the overlapping operation of using the skills within a social situation with its complex relationships between institutions and discourses. It "encompasses the strategies language users use to engage with texts and takes into account the ways previous experiences with text influence these strategies" (Boughey, 1999: 23). An understanding of literacy in higher education that moves beyond surface level correctness of students' language to "statements about the ability to satisfy the intellectual demands of communication in varied subject disciplines" (Nightingale, 1988:66) is largely the result of a debate between language as grammar and language as meaning.

Because academic literacy requires that students take on particular vocabularies, ways of reading, writing, speaking and listening, and also ways of seeing the world and ways of behaving in it, each discipline's academic literacy can be seen to construct its own cultural community. The idea of culture suggests that engagement and immersion are integral to the process of becoming part of that culture. Students have to acquire an understanding of how the culture works if they wish to become members. Bartholomae describes this process of acculturation thus: "The students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were members of the academy, or historians or anthropologists or economists; they have to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language. . . They must learn to speak our language" (1985: 4).

If we are, as Bartholomae suggests, expecting students to become familiar with the knowledge-making rules and writing conventions of our particular academic discipline, then the issue for

educators is how to assist students in this experience. But if we are expecting them to simply acculturate completely into our ways of being, then other ethical questions come to the fore. If we discuss academic literacy at a purely functional level, then we expose ourselves to a totally assimilationist position whereby students are required only to conform to the practices of the disciplinary tribe. Failure to take a critical stance in a reflection on academic literacy "can lead to higher education students becoming 'reproducers of knowledge' engaged in 'knowledge telling discourse' rather than 'knowledge producers' engaged in 'knowledge generating discourse'" (Bartholomae 1985: 139).

Taking on tribal ways

Foundational provision is about enabling students' access to their tribe of choice. While academic language is no-one's mother tongue (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), some students bring with them literacy practices which allow for easier acquisition of the values, beliefs and attitudes – and resultant language forms and processes. Other students, notably economically disadvantaged students, will have a tougher time of it. If we continue to teach as if the ways in which we construct knowledge in our disciplines are neutral, we will never be able to transform higher education in South Africa. But if we become increasingly aware of how literacy practices are socially constructed and far from common sense, we can begin to make them more accessible to our students.

But I should point out that, in teaching in ways which make our customs overt to these newcomers, we are bound to find some of our tribal norms difficult to defend.

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Academic Development and the 'Language Problem'

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Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to re-visit some of the language-related ideas which are central, both pedagogically and politically, to academic development researchers and teachers. It considers the implications of understanding language as social practice or discourse (Fairclough, 1994, 2005) with a view to sharpening insights into what, in academic circles, is frequently called 'the language problem'. This perspective can facilitate improvement in classroom and research practice and, importantly, enable academic development staff to engage more confidently with academics within mainstream disciplines, and to renegotiate the ways in which 'the language problem' is understood.

At the outset, it is necessary to provide a theoretical framework within which to consider some of the common beliefs about the possibilities of textual recognition and prediction and about the nature of language that inform perceptions of social and educational contexts. It is those beliefs that impact, implicitly or explicitly, on ideas about the nature and origin of language difficulties, about what is meant by 'epistemological access' and about what it means to understand language as discourse.

An alternative fairytale world

Frequently, theoretical points are best made initially by drawing on a striking example of a text which provides an *alternative* to the commonly accepted generic norm, something unexpected and different from what has often come to be regarded as natural, transparent and easily accessible to all. In these cases, when the usual conventions are undermined, common assumptions about generic forms as well as the social and ideological nature of language are thrown into stark relief and we are able to see clearly how language works (often invisibly) to construct and represent the world in very specific, value-laden ways and how deeply entrenched our expectations are. It is then possible to make a range of observations – first, about the nature of language which can be applied to all texts, including those encountered by our university students, and second, about our ability to recognize text types and to predict their likely development.

For my purposes here, an abridged version of Babette Cole's now-classic revisionist fairytale serves as an apt example:

> Princess Smartypants did not want to get married. She enjoyed being Ms. because she was very pretty and rich, all the princes wanted her to be their Mrs. Princess Smartypants wanted to live in her castle with her pets and do exactly as she pleased. "It's high time you smartened yourself up", said her mother the Queen. "Stop messing about with those animals and find yourself a husband!" Suitors were always turning up at the castle and making a nuisance of themselves. "Right", declared Princess Smartypants, "whoever can accomplish the tasks that I will set, as they say, will win my hand". She asked Prince Compost to stop the slugs eating her garden. She asked Prince Rushforth to feed her pets. She challenged Prince Pelvis to a roller disco marathon. She invited Prince Boneshaker for a cross country ride on her motorbike. She called on Prince Vertigo to rescue her from her tower. She sent Prince Bashthumb to chop some of the firewood in the royal forest. She suggested to Prince Fetlock that he might like to put her pony through its paces. She told Prince Grovel to take her mother the Queen shopping. She commanded Prince Swimbladder to retrieve her magic ring from the goldfish pond. None of the princes could accomplish the task he was set. They all left in disgrace. "That's that then" said Smartypants, thinking she was safe. Then Prince Swashbuckle turned up. He stopped the slugs eating her garden, fed her pets, roller discoed until dawn, rode for miles on her motorbike. He rescued her from her tower. He found some firewood to chop in the forest. He even tamed her horrid pony...took her mother the queen shopping and retrieved her magic ring from the gold fish pond. Prince Swashbuckle

didn't think Princess Smartypants was so smart. So she gave him a magic kiss and he turned into a gigantic warty toad! Prince Swashbuckle left in a big hurry. When the other princes heard what had happened to Prince Swashbuckle, none of them wanted to marry Smartypants, so she lived happily ever after. (Adapted from Cole 1986).

What has happened here and why is this text as humorous as it is? Why do many readers recognize that something is not 'normal' in the world of the Cole tale? How can they be so sure? What role has language played in shaping this 'alternative'?

Understanding language as a social construct

What does this example reveal about the nature of language? The single most pivotal observation to make is that language needs to be understood as social practice or 'discourse'. It is a social construct, which has the capacity to shape, and to reshape, the way in which we conceptualise the world. As such, it does not *reflect* a social order; it creates and shapes it. As discourse, which is defined by Kress as 'systematically-organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution . . .' (1989:7), it is integrally linked to social power relationships and the attitudes, beliefs and values which are embedded in the language used and there can be no such thing as 'innocent' language. Language embodies the values and beliefs underpinning the social world and through deliberate and specific lexical choices and through the particular sequencing of information. Cole's fairy-tale, for example, offers us different representations of the world from that of the more familiar, traditional genre. It presents different sets of values, in this case about gender relationships and stereotypes which in turn, position the reader in different ways in relation to the text. When we name people, we position them in relation to ourselves and the rest of society.

Recognising and predicting text

Habitual language use results in people coming to expect certain features to typify different texts, and by extension, the world those texts represent. We learn to predict and expect a particular social order and the kinds of values and relationships that are acceptable in it. If particular language is used for long enough, the values and norms represented in that language come to be seen as natural rather than socially constructed; they become taken-for-granted and it is often assumed that they are widely known by the vast majority of people. For example, most people who grew up reading Western fairy tales are very familiar with the 'language' of the traditional fairy tale and, because of this, are able to predict, in broad terms at least, the central narrative events, the cast of characters, their names, personalities and desires as well as the dominant values of their social world. This ability is the consequence of exposure to the generic text type via its widespread circulation within a particular social context, with all its narrative, structural and linguistic features. Readers 'know' who the characters are and what will happen. It is 'normal' common sense in many societies for the princess to be beautiful, virtuous and gentle, and often waiting for personal fulfillment in the arms of a prince. Older women, unless they are wicked and devious step mothers, are largely invisible while loving and wise fathers frequently feature prominently. Suitors are usually charming, handsome and rich and, after obligatory crises which require male expertise and intervention, they usually win the love of the princess and the approval of her father and the story ends with marriage and a promise of a never-ending utopian existence. In other words, the discursive patterns, internal rules and conventions of the fairytale have become familiar to the point where they are common sense: the 'language' or discourse of the text, its narrative shape and the linguistic and structural features which characterize it, are seen as 'natural' – they are quickly recognised and easily understood.

Equally, readers are able to recognize subversion of the genre, to know when established conventions are being broken, challenged or changed. Crucially though, it is only because they have been exposed to and are familiar with the language of the traditional fairytale that they can make these

predictions - without that knowledge they could not make the same inferences or find the same meaning – they may recognize some humour but significant insights and comparisons would elude them. It is also clear that when we speak of the 'language' of the fairytale, far more than grammar and syntax are at stake here – the language we are referring to includes the recognition of broad patterns and features of a particular text type and, importantly, the values and attitudes represented in that text.

Fairytales and academic text

What has all this got to do with the challenges faced by our students and how can the fairy tale text be of any relevance to or have any link with the kinds of texts which our students encounter in tertiary institutions?

The exemplar text may seem very distant from those read by our students, but as indicated earlier, it is possible to make crucial observations about the nature of language and the possibilities of recognition and prediction which can be applied equally to any text type. It is from these observations that we can reach a greater understanding of what, in academic circles, is frequently referred to as 'the language problem'.

Understanding 'the language problem'

For those involved in academic development, it remains a common experience to be asked to 'sort out', 'fix up' or 'improve' students' language, by which is most often meant discrete linguistic structures, technical skills or broad structural issues – concord, tenses and use of the passive voice, punctuation, referencing, sentence, paragraph and essay construction all fall under 'the language problem' and all focus primarily on skills- related or structural surface errors. For some, despite the fact that this is now beginning to lose currency, the assumption is still that these linguistic issues can be successfully dealt with outside the mainstream lecture hall 'home' discipline, either by the academic person located within the specific discipline but nevertheless something of an 'outsider' or worse, by a completely separate and decontextualised course. Here the belief is that the real problems lie in structural linguistic deficiencies and not in broader discursive practices within disciplines.

If, however, we take the insights drawn from the exemplar text seriously, and accept the notion of language as social practice or discourse which embodies values and attitudes which can shift and change over time, then the language problem assumes completely different dimensions.

University discourses and the first year student

When students enter university, they are faced with a myriad of institutional discourses which include everything that is said, done and valued in the institution. Contesting views about what constitutes the 'proper' role and activities of the academy, what counts as knowledge, how knowledge is transmitted or constructed, what is meant by learning and teaching and what we mean when we speak of 'academic standards' lie at the heart of institutional discourses and reflect institutional values and priorities which shift and change and vie for dominant positions. Institutional discourses include what is said and done in lecture theatres, seminar and tutorial rooms, residences, tearooms, vice-chancellors boardrooms and secretaries' offices. They include official university statements and numerous policy documents which range from subjects like equity, transformation and redress to letterhead layout and the lecture timetable. Choices of text books and the construction of curricula along with pedagogical preferences are added to this mix and combine to make important ideological statements. For the incoming student, however, much of this is invisible – the lecture and the seminar rooms are the common experience and above all is the challenge of the

academic text which remains the source of much student anxiety and lies at the heart of 'the language problem'.

If we return to the lessons learnt in the world of the fairy tale, we will know firstly, that texts need to be read and understood in very particular contexts – at the university this means that they are firmly located within their specific disciplines. Secondly, we will also know that texts embody particular linguistic features and patterns and more importantly, values and attitudes. In the university context, this means that a scientific text is underpinned by a completely different set of values from one in the Humanities. Thirdly, and of paramount importance, we will know that if a particular text type has not been encountered before, its specific features and underpinning values will not be recognized – the language or discourse of the text cannot be understood and there is no possibility of the expectation or prediction that was shown to be so central in understanding a generic text type. This is the experience of the vast majority of our students when they enter the university – the text types are unfamiliar and opaque and moreover, they differ from discipline to discipline. This is diametrically opposed to the experience of the lecturer for whom the practices and language of the discipline are so commonplace as to have become habitual, something that everyone just knows and experiences as a matter of course. Many students have simply never had exposure to these text types and they cannot be expected to learn by osmosis – without explicit instruction, they have no way of accessing them successfully.

As long ago as 1987, Morrow spoke of the importance of providing our students, not so much with geographical or financial access to Higher Education, but to what he termed 'epistemological access' to the underlying knowledge systems that so often confound and confuse students. That observation is as true now as it was then and both the academic staff and the students need to become explicitly aware of their discipline's 'epistemological core,' of the kind of knowledge valued by the discipline, of what kinds of knowledge are excluded from it and of which linguistic constructions are best used to represent those values. For example, does the discipline value knowledge that is built around precise measurement, accurate observation and beliefs about the possibility of objective observation or does it build its knowledge system on the basis of multiple truths, sliding meaning and a belief that objective observations are impossible? And how are these beliefs expressed in language?

James Gee's (1990) ideas about the relationship between primary and secondary Discourses are also relevant here. For him, Discourse (as opposed to discourse which is language in use), is "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions and 'artifacts' of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network" (1990: 131). His distinction between primary and secondary Discourses is crucial to our understanding of students entering the university for the first time. Primary Discourse is acquired in 'face-to-face communication with intimates', within the family in the native language and is used to indicate 'our membership within a particular local community' (1990: 152). Secondary Discourses 'involve, by definition, interaction with people with whom one is not 'intimate' (with whom one cannot assume lots of shared knowledge and experience) or they involve interactions where one is being 'formal'. Secondary Discourses are used in schools, national media and in many social, financial and government agencies (1990:152).

It is the relationship between primary and secondary Discourses that help us to understand the varying experiences that incoming students have of the university. If children grow up in a home where educational and other socially valued discourses are common place and have been passed on through several generations, they are far more likely to find it easier to acquire school and university based Discourses than those children who have not had access to those Discourses. This divide is

further exacerbated by teachers who often perceive their difficulties as a sign of a lack of ability or intelligence.

'The language problem' revisited

The claim that students entering the university have 'a language problem' is, at best, a very partial and reductive description of the challenges students face. Students entering university for the first time do indeed have a language problem but they are challenged, not by one language but by several languages, each related to a different discipline. The 'language problem' experienced by our students is a far cry from the one identified and described by many academics – it reaches way beyond the realm of grammar and syntax into the complexities and values of disciplinary discourses and knowledge bases. When students learn to read and write the language of their disciplines, they need to be taught by a disciplinary expert, someone who is fluent in the language and expectations of the discipline and someone who can make that language explicit to the disciplinary novice student. It is the role of academic development staff, first to understand the nature of 'the language problem' fully themselves and second, to provide ways of facilitating this understanding amongst the academic staff. It is only by working alongside the disciplinary specialists that these challenges can be addressed – it is only then that we can develop interventions which result in students acquiring the secondary discourses they need to succeed at university and gaining an understanding of all the discursive practices that constitute their disciplines. And it is only when we have achieved a common understanding of the complexities of 'the language problem' that we will create an educational context where this can happen.

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Digital Literacy in the context of extended studies programmes

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The research and practice of academic literacy in higher education institutions (HEIs) is increasingly acknowledging the emergence of online teaching and learning environments (Ingraham, Levy, McKenna and Roberts, 2007). As new digital technologies and software applications continue to be developed and become available for implementation at South African HEIs, the challenge to make appropriate use of these advancements to expedite teaching and learning is highlighted. However, if the argument for digital literacy to form part of academic literacy is to be supported, then the necessity for a more theoretical underpinning of digital literacy should be acknowledged, and appropriate strategies to promote digital literacy developed and implemented. This chapter focuses on the rapidly and continually evolving area of digital literacy, also commonly referred to as 'computer literacy' or 'technological literacy'. The context of extended studies programmes within developing countries is acknowledged, current frameworks of digital literacy are examined, and the chapter concludes with suggestions for implementing digital literacy in this context.

Introduction

Academic literacy is described by McKenna (2003) as comprising the norms and values of higher education as manifested in discipline-specific practices, and she notes the difficulty in making each discipline's academic literacy practices overt. She points out that this academic literacy performs a 'gate-keeping' function for success in higher education. While NAP has declared "competence in academic literacy in the required medium of instruction (usually English) and in Mathematical literacy have been deemed to be key factors in determining academic success" (in McKenna, 2003: 64), the mediation of new technologies in achieving academic literacy is worthy of further exploration. Marsh and Singleton (2009) acknowledge that general literacy and technology are integral to one another, and believe that the increasingly complex relationship between the two is caused by the developments in technology that are transforming the very nature of literacy.

The original intention in using technology to mediate learning was simply to expedite learning (Larson, in Rosenberg, 2006). However, in pursuit of this activity, opportunities for redefining new objectives have emerged and are recognised as prompting new ways of thinking in themselves. The early objectives of reducing training time and costs, and promoting the acquisition of knowledge, have been superseded by interactive engagement involving access to information, knowledge exchange and collaboration. This is fostered by and accredited to the evolution of learning systems, which is prompted in turn by technological innovation (Larson in Rosenberg, 2006).

Defining Digital literacy

Within the HEI context in South Africa (SA), the term most often used in discussion in this area is 'computer literacy'. However, this may be viewed as somewhat restrictive both in intention and practice, as the term implicates a focus on the computers as an end in themselves rather than simply one tool to facilitate wider digital literacy. Similarly, the traditional end-user productivity software tools, such as word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation packages, while useful in themselves, are simply one facet of what is currently viewed as 'digital literacy'.

Definitions of 'digital literacy' have evolved over time, from the ability to understand, evaluate, and integrate information in a variety of formats delivered by computer (Gilster, 1997) through to the more recent editorial of O'Brien and Scharber (2008), who report that the term variously refers to the capability to use current media or technology in a competent manner, the artefacts that digitally literate people produce, or the activities in which digitally literate people can engage.

Eshet (2002) suggests that in order to achieve digital literacy, a variety of cognitive thinking strategies should be used. To this end, he proposes a terminology framework for digital literacy, comprising photo-visual, reproduction, lateral, and information literacies, and indicates that the quality of work achieved within digital environments will be determined by these literacies (Eshet, 2002). While acknowledging the "undefined areas, uncertainties, and disorientations" in attempting to define digital literacy, Tornero (2004: 3) clarifies that digital literacy is more than knowledge that is technical or operative, and includes activities that are "cognitive, communicative, and cultural" in nature.

'Technological literacy' was referred to in the US Department of Education, 'No Child Left Behind' Act (2001: Title II, Part D, Section 2402 (b) (2) (A)), which stated their goal as being, "To assist every student in crossing the digital divide by ensuring that every student is technologically literate ….". Snyder (2006) defines 'technological literacy' as referring to the capacity to access and use networked computer resources. She then emphasises that literacy is broadened by the presentation of information in multiple formats via computers from diverse sources, and she echoes Eshet's (2002) point that particular skill is required in order to understand and use this information.

Both Prinsloo (2005) and O'Brien and Scharber (2008) use the term 'new literacies', depicting digital literacy as an extension of previously identified literacies.

In the context of this chapter, the term 'digital literacy' is preferred to those of 'technological literacy' (which is too broad), 'computer literacy' (which is too narrow) and 'new literacy' (being too vague).

Digital literacy in marginal contexts

Snyder and Prinsloo (2007) state that developments in technology have affected social practices in all aspects of society, including the educational environment. They note that the extent to which the new digital technologies effect positive change is constrained by contextual social factors including economic resources, health, culture, and employment. However, even previously disadvantaged learners are found to have some prior experience of using cell phones and digital storage media such as CDs. The challenge is to bridge the gap from the social context through to the educational context within developing countries, and engage learners within the developing world to afford them equal opportunities to developed world learners. Klecun (2008: 270) suggests that digital exclusion "is reinforced by and in turn reinforces social exclusion", and as such, demands attention.

The 'digital divide' is described by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Organisation (2004: 5) as "the increasing access gap between those who have and those who do not have access to information and communication technologies, access to content that benefits them socially and economically, skills to take advantage of ICT services, and the ability to afford to pay for digital services". The SA HEI context is characterised by a dual previously advantaged / disadvantaged student learner population. Academic staff are confronted with the so-called 'digital divide' not simply between previously advantaged and disadvantaged institutions or groups of learners, but on occasion, directly within a particular group of learners taking the same course at the same HEI. While some previously disadvantaged learners are admitted to extended studies curricula, not all of their courses of study are exclusive to this group. The varying adoption of digital practices by academic staff may further confuse the digitally uninitiated learner. Some staff may view digital practices as integral to their teaching and learning, while other staff, in fact, may themselves not be digitally literate.

The notion of 'digital equity' is described by Rocap (2003) as being more than the equitable distribution of hardware, software and connectivity. He emphasises that "the education, resources and opportunities that support meaningful participation in the definition, design and use of these technologies" is the important issue (Rocap, 2003: 3). Early attempts at computer-mediated instruction have been reported by Gilster (1997) as failing because they focused on the technology itself rather than pedagogy. Revised perspectives on the digital divide include that of Warschauer (in Amiel, 2006), who details four variables as influencing the digital divide, namely: physical resources, digital resources, human resources, and social resources.

Instead of access to or use of technological tools, Amiel (2006) argues for the conceptualisation of technological divides as a factor of technological literacy. He reports misguided spending of considerable capital in deploying computers into schools around the world. He claims that teachers and learners should focus on literacy, encouraging the understanding of the process of technology (Amiel, 2006). Similarly, Rheingold (2008) exhorts practitioners to follow the literacy, rather than the technology. In fact, Amiel (2006) goes so far as to claim that the computer is unnecessary in promoting technological literacy; in the absence of the computer this can be achieved by using other tools such as television, radio and telephones.

Thus, as Snyder and Prinsloo (2007) note, the digital divide debate has shifted from hardware and software provision to the challenges of integrating ICTs into social contexts. This view is supported by Klecun (2008: 277), who reports that electronic communication and access to information is a primary motivator for persons wishing to engage with ICTs, suggesting a curriculum "not focused on office software and IT skills but encompassing a variety of e-literacy skills". This notion of the desired presence of a variety of e-literacy skills was addressed and expanded upon by Eshet (2002), Eshet-Alkalai (2004) and Aviram and Eshet-Alkalai (2006).

Eshet's framework for digital literacy

Historical broad use of the term 'digital literacy' led Eshet (2002) to develop, and later expand upon (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004), a terminology framework for digital literacies to apply to the design of meaningful technology-based learning environments. This framework consists of:

Photo-Visual Literacy (Reading visual representation): The modern Graphic User Interfaces (GUIs) mirror the early forms of pictorial rather than an alphabetical communication (Snyder, in Eshet-Alkalai (2004). This is characterised by good visual memory and strong intuitive-associative

thinking, and led to the identification of synchronic learning–synchronised stimulation using multimedia (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

Reproduction Literacy (Creative recycling of existing materials): The advent of the printing press made it possible to reproduce information on a larger scale than previously possible. Later, digitisation made reproduction and distribution even easier and faster, facilitating creativity but also raising questions of plagiarism. This literacy is characterised by the ability to produce a creative work or interpretation by integrating pre-existing artefacts (Labbo, Reinking and McKenna, in Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

Branching Literacy (Hypermedia and non-linear thinking): The concept of the book form with numbered pages promoted flexible text navigation as it facilitated both a linear and non-linear path through the book. Hypermedia moved users from a relatively linear method of thinking to more flexible, self-governed navigation, but also presented the challenge of constructing knowledge from independent sources of information obtained in a non-linear way. This literacy is characterised by multi-dimensional thinking and good spatial orientation (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

Information Literacy (Sceptism): Although the need to evaluate information is not new, it has been exacerbated in the current digital environment. This literacy is characterised by critical thinking, and cognitive skills are used to evaluate information effectively, as well as to identify irrelevant and incorrect information (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

Socio-Emotional Literacy (Integrity and maturity in communication and collaboration): This literacy was included in a subsequent expansion in pursuit of a clearer conceptual framework for digital literacies within which to examine and improve understanding of the cognitive skills necessary to function effectively within a digital environment (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). Each of these literacies was verified using specific activities of first-graders through to adult learners. New opportunities for communication and collaboration have presented learners with new problems of authenticity and validity. This literacy is characterised by an analytical and mature mind, and presumes a high degree of information and branching literacy (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

The Eshet-Alkalai (2004) model was later reviewed by Aviram and Eshet-Alkalai (2006) with the intention of underpinning current practice with a sound theoretical foundation. This is an important contribution, as they consider both a conservative and two sceptical strategies for theorisation (Figure 1).

The first conservative strategy contends that digital literacy skills are precisely that, and no more. This approach would then lead to the further examination of the relationships among the listed skills, their compatibility, and their effective explanatory power to account for differences in learners.

The second strategy, both moderate sceptical and radical sceptical, makes the assumption that there is something much deeper beyond a list of skills. These strategies are suggested as representing learning styles (Dunn and Dunn, in Aviram and Eshet-Alkalai, 2006), multiple intelligences (Gardner, in Aviram and Eshet-Alkalai, 2006), or personality types (Briggs and Myers, in Aviram and Eshet-Alkalai, 2006), and more radically, that digital culture and book-based culture are fundamentally incompatible (Tapscott, in Aviram and Eshet-Alkalai, 2006).

Each of these strategies promotes deeper thinking and heightened awareness of the desirability of a theoretical basis when engaging in digital literacy practices. A variety of other representative frameworks are examined in the following section.
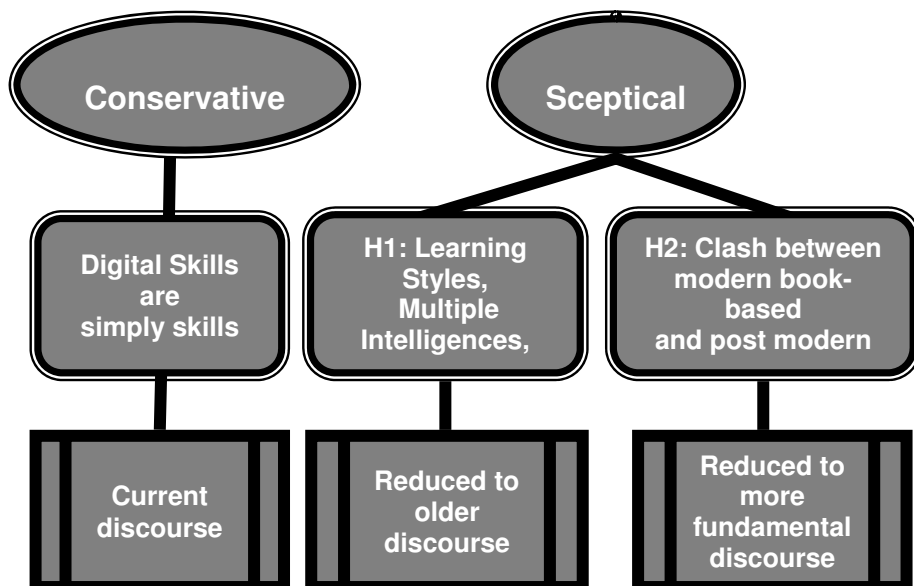
Figure 1. Proposed Strategies for the Development of a Theoretical Framework in the Discussion of Digital Literacy (after Aviram and Eshet-Alkalai, 2006)

Further Frameworks

A variety of other frameworks emphasise different aspects and the broader environment of digital literacy. Examples of these from Tornero (2004), Chibaya (2008), and Schneckenberg (2008) are presented below.

Tornero (2004) notes the convergence of what he describes as the original concept of media literacy and the most current one of digital literacy. He suggests that the acquisition of digital literacy is not a goal in itself, but should be seen as a capability linked to the world at large, promoting opportunities for personal and professional development. In proposing his new model for promoting digital literacy, Tornero (2004) also recognises the need for a cultural focus related to digital literacy, observes that digital literacy can only be developed in a framework of complete integration with the interests of individuals, institutions, and communities and, lastly, states that digital literacy should lead to a democratic citizenship. Somewhat along the lines of a traditional Capability Maturity Model, Tornero (2004) depicts a digital culture progress scale (Figure 2) moving from initial expression of aspirations through to institutional maturity and innovation.
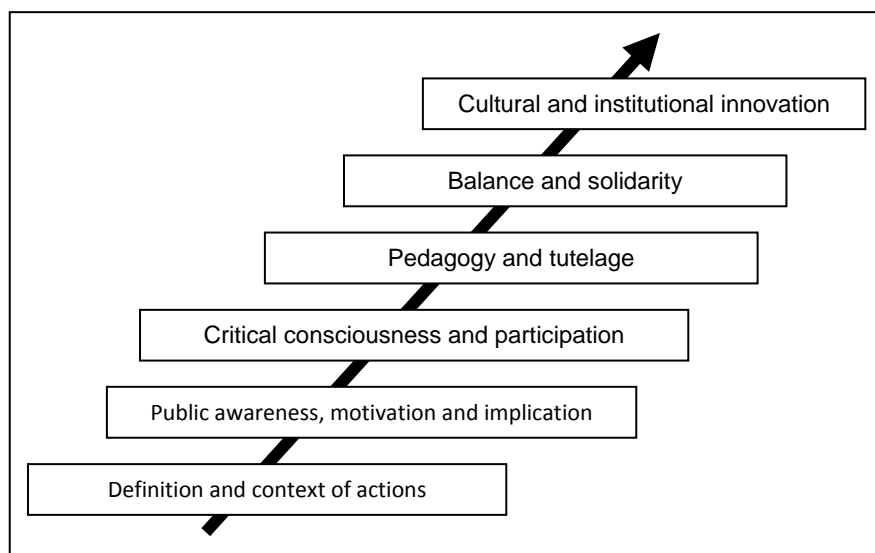

Figure 2. Digital Culture Progress Scale (Tornero, 2004)

Chibaya (2008) has reported on introducing computer skills courses for extended curriculum learners who may otherwise avoid engaging with digital media. He advocates a pragmatic approach where skills are introduced only as the need arises, and he proposes a negotiated, needs-driven approach that satisfies cross-curricula demands. The six course modules that he deems necessary and sufficient for success are:
- search for and use information from the Internet and communicate electronically using e-mail,
- create, format and manipulate documents using a word processor,
- create, format, manipulate and interpret spreadsheets,
- use a presentation package for designing and handling presentations,
- define and manipulate database systems, including tables, queries, forms and reports, and
- identify and design basic websites using HTML tags and codes.

This is a fairly standard approach within the higher education sector in South Africa. What may distinguish it from other limited approaches and align it with Eshet's framework, is the associated

intention and implementation. For example, it is possible to map Chibaya's (2008) suggested six modules onto Eshet-Alkalai's (2004) five Cognitive Digital Literacies (Figure 3). This suggests that the approach adopted by Chibaya (2008) may exhibit some synergy with Eshet-Alkalai's (2004) conceptual framework for digital literacy.
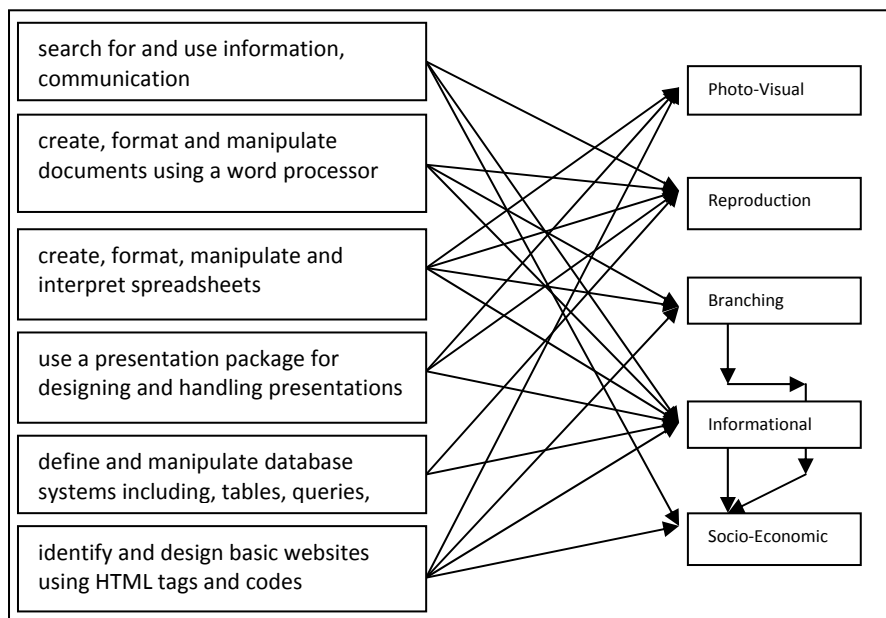

Figure 3. Mapping Chibaya's (2008) 6 modules onto the 5 Eshet-Alkalai (2004) Cognitive Digital Literacies

Finally, the role of the human factor is emphasised in Schneckenberg's (2008) model of eCompetence (Figure 4). Academic staff and institutions are the focus of this layered representation: from a micro-level of eCompetence for individual university staff members, moving though the meso-level of general competence of a group of academic staff within a university, with institutional competence development measures connecting to the macro-level of 'eStrategy' in universities, and acknowledging the wider learning technology societal context.

While the development of an HEI's strategy for technological innovation at the macro-level and the identification of technology champions within management are essential components, the key to this model is the ability of HEIs to effect organisational change within the meso-level of the model i.e. the academic staff as a group. Schneckenberg (2008) recommends a series of institutional incentives be offered within a holistic institutional approach.

All of these frameworks are relevant within our context of promoting digital literacy as a component of academic literacy within extended studies curricula. Eshet's (2002) very useful terminology framework can be supplemented by Tornero's (2004) cultural focus, Chibaya's (2008) pragmatic approach, and Schneckenberg's (2008) emphasis on the human factor, and in combination they can all contribute to developing the understanding and practice of digital literacy. Some suggestions on how to accomplish this from a practical point of view are proposed in the next section.

Figure 4. Model of eCompetence Layers (Schneckenberg, 2008)
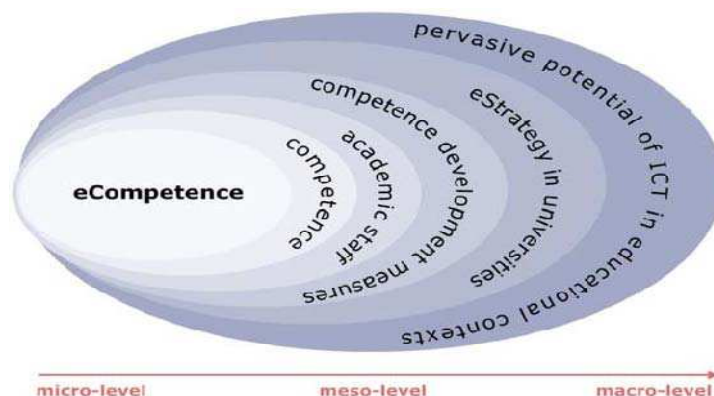
A way forward

Currently, digital literacy practices at HEIs in SA centre largely on productivity tools rather than on more media-rich communication environments and true cross-curricula integration is limited. It is important that digital literacy should be acknowledged as a necessary and integral component of academic literacy within the framework of extended studies programmes in South African HEIs. Although a pragmatic approach may be desirable initially, it should be soundly and consciously based on a strong theoretical foundation and regarded as a starting point rather than an end in itself.

An apparent consensus in the literature is that not only does digital literacy comprise a set of desirable skills to be acquired, but also that a holistic systems approach should be adopted. A means of assisting in the development and provision of relevant digitally based teaching and learning activities needs to be considered. The tests for various literacies described by Eshet-Alkalai (2004) may provide a good starting point in the identification of problem areas in target learner groups, which may provide a launching point from which a variety of innovative media-rich solutions can be implemented.

In addition, acknowledging Tornero's (2004) framework of operating within the extended context of cultural focus and complete integration with the interests of stakeholders would promote the notion of digital citizenship rather than a digital divide. This is particularly relevant for the extended studies programme teachers and learners, who operate within the overall academic context of the HEI in SA.

I suggest a multiple action strategy to redress the multi-level digital divide confronting HEI faculty in developing countries and, thereby, promote digital literacy as a component of full academic literacy. Firstly, a more conscious theoretical basis as suggested by Aviram and Eshet-Alkalai (2006) would enhance the pragmatic approach (centred on productivity tools) of Chibaya (2008) when implementing a digital skills course for extended studies learners, within the framework of academic literacy. Secondly, the extensive integration of digital activities within regular or extended studies curricula is recommended. This will promote the notion of the digital hardware and software as

facilitating media rather than an end in themselves. Thirdly, where and whenever possible, academic staff should promote digital literacy by making use of common technologies such as social software, CDs or cell phones, which are ubiquitous, even within developing countries. Furthermore, the development of the digital literacy or eCompetency of the academic staff themselves should be comprehensively supported (Schneckenberg, 2008) at an institutional and pedagogical level. Finally, the educational environment should acknowledge the cultural context and strive for integration with all stakeholders (Tornero, 2004). These stakeholders include the community, the institutional environment, the academic staff and the learners.

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Field knowledge and learning on foundation programmes

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Introduction

Foundation programmes are regular degree or diploma programmes which are extended with additional support for learning. The object of the programmes is to provide disadvantaged students with the means to stay in their chosen university course and to stand a good chance of graduating within the given time (Department of Education, 2006). Earlier models for foundation programmes focussed on teaching students skills, for example, reading and writing skills, in order to deal with subject knowledge at the university level; the assumption being that inadequate schooling has not suitably prepared students for higher education study (Boughey, 2002). The current dominant approach to foundation has shifted focus from student unpreparedness for university to making the ways in which subject knowledge is constructed and produced, or epistemology, more transparent (Boughey, 2009; Mckenna, 2003). A focus on epistemological access, or access to the structure and ways of doing in subjects, works well in terms of retention and success for fields in which the mastery of subject knowledge is the object of teaching. It may work less well, however, where the object of teaching is preparation for a vocation. Here, subject knowledge is not an end in itself but rather a tool for reaching an end, that of work-preparedness in a particular field. Thus an additional sort of knowing may be necessary which is an integrated knowing towards a particular vocational purpose.

The concept of vocational identity, which is discussed in this paper, resonates well with Ronald Barnett's view that successful learning at university involves more than just epistemological access but the development of a more holistic, integrated university identity (Barnett, 2005, 2008). Research into the field of vocational education has shown that a sense of vocational or professional identity may enhance student learning and motivation (Johanssen, Hard, Hult et al., 2008).

The paper suggests teaching approaches that may foster vocational identity and learning. Extracts from interviews with foundation students engaged in these approaches are then used to illustrate developing vocational identity.

Vocational programmes and vocational identity

Vocational programmes are those such as Engineering or Graphic Design which prepare students for a particular career (Michael Barnett, 2006). Such programmes may have a logic in their structure, teaching approaches and assessments which focuses on the vocation students are going into. Muller (2008) refers to such programmes as having a 'contextual coherence'. Here, there may be emphasis on simulation tasks and overarching theories and the sequence they are taught in may be less important than in more general non-vocational programmes. General, non-vocational programmes, such as pure science and arts programmes, are then said to have a more conceptual coherence. In reality, vocational programmes have elements of both contextual and conceptual coherence.

Michael Barnett (2006) explains that both vocational and non-vocational programmes are derived from knowledge within their related research fields. For example, both Mechanics knowledge in a Mechanical Engineering programme and Physics knowledge in a Physics programme are derived from the field of research Physics. In being recontextualised from research into teaching curricula knowledge is selectively included or excluded, sequenced and made assessable. Where they differ,

however, is that knowledge in vocational programmes undergoes a double recontextualisation process. Firstly, there is recontextualisation to produce a teachable university curriculum and secondly there is recontextualisation for relevance to the vocational field. Michael Barnett's (2006) theorisation suggests that access to vocational programme knowledge would need to be both epistemological (providing access to the nature of subject knowledge) and vocational (providing access to how things are done in the field). Access to knowledge is closely linked to identity.

Identity

What we do and how we do things, whether they are with our everyday social group or in an academic or work environment, involves participation and the taking on, albeit partially, of a particular socially-situated identity (Gee, 1999). Everyday identities would tend to be characterised by communal acceptance of the right way to do things and a relatively uncritical view of knowledge derived from pre-university informal and formal learning (Northedge, 2003). This may be quite different from the sort of identity required at university; students are thus likely to enter university as peripheral participants. In vocationally-orientated programmes there is a third identity which students would only be peripherally engaged with – that of the work field they are studying towards. Students would thus need to straddle different identities on entering the university within 'the bustling community of many voices and different ways of knowing' (Notrthedge, 2003: 28).

According to Ronald Barnett (2005, 2008), being successful is about 'becoming a student' through changing identity to match oneself to what is in one's studies. This becomes possible when a student adopts ways of thinking and doing peculiar to the university which are different from normative roles and identities. Students develop a voice in that they talk of their own knowledge and experiences through the lens of their new learning:

> She discovers her own voice, is able to deploy it … she brings together not just her own intentionalities but her own will … she is not just carried forward but carries herself forward… (2008: 62)

For Barnett (2005), this sort of voice is an indicator of intrinsic motivation to learn, of having an holistic sense of a university self. He contrasts this holistic sense to more external motivations concerned with graduating and earning a salary, which have less positive effect on student learning and success. Being successful at university, however, involves more than just this developing sense of identity, but also an orientation to recognising that there is much that is not known within and outside the university. An orientation to strangeness is an awareness of self and also an awareness of what more needs to be done and the confidence to engage in further learning (Barnett, 2005).

Ronald Barnett's views on success may, however, be too orientated towards a general sense of being a student, whereas vocational identity is more focussed on a particular field. As Bernstein (2000:59) reminds us, identity arises out of interaction with particular rules and ways of doing, not some general notion of being, so that students can begin to recognise themselves.

> …identity arises out of particular social order through relations which the identity enters into with other identities of reciprocal recognition, support, mutual legitimisation and finally through a negotiated collective purpose (Ibid).

Developing a vocational identity involves just such a specified orientation, even though more general dispositions such as orientation to change may also be important.

Dahlgren and Petocz (2008) describe vocational identities as being external or internal to the individual. Where the identity is external, it is viewed, firstly, and in the most limited fashion, as

comprising a number of atomistic technical abilities to be mastered in order to function in professional life. Much of what happened in the old Technikons could be said to develop this identity and this is still a persuasive ideology in the new universities of technology, though it is increasingly under attack from research into workplaces (see, for example the HESA report on graduate attributes from 2009).

A more expansive notion of externally constituted identity is one of coming to understand what is happening at work and typical objects of inquiry in the workplace; project learning and perhaps problem-based learning techniques may help to build this sort of identity. This is a more connected identity as it deals with work as a whole rather than with atomistic tasks. The most engaged form of identity is where students begin to see themselves internally as embodying what it is to be a professional in the field, or of having an internalised vocational identity (Dahlgren and Petocz, 2008); this type of identity resonates well with Barnett's (2005) identity as having a voice and 'becoming a student'.

Wheelahan (2006) argues that emerging vocational identity is more than just about roles, values and ways of doing in a particular occupation. It is also about understanding work fields in modern society as being in part structured for change as their practitioners are forced to deal with new problems. This sentiment is echoed by employers in South Africa in that ability to be flexible, innovative, to learn new ways of doing and hence be open to change are afforded a high status (HESA, 2008: 14, 15). These observations also resonate well with Barnett's (2005) conception of higher education as needing to prepare students for 'strangeness'.

Knowledge of the field students are studying towards can enhance their learning and subsequent retention. Students who develop a vocational identity may experience a greater sense of confidence and independence in their studies. Furthermore, having a vocational identity gives coherence to and rationale for learning discrete subject offerings which otherwise may be viewed by students as unrelated and pointless. (Dahlgren and Petocz, 2008; Johanssen, Hard, Hult et al. 2008; Kaufman and Feldman, 2004).

The next section describes some teaching approaches which may enhance these qualities, namely: problem-based learning, integrated projects and personal development plans. The potential success of these approaches is then supported with references to examples of foundation students' voices.

Approaches to support a vocational identity

Even though vocational curricula are in part derived form from how things are done at work (Michael Barnett, 2005) the subjects tend to be taught discretely. What matters therefore, in developing a vocational identity is how the different subjects or subject fragments are orientated towards performing particular tasks, which derive from how things are typically done in particular types of workplace. Layton, Jenkins, McGill et al. (1993) describe the relationship between subject knowledge, relying more on conceptual coherence, and dealing with work/vocational issues which rely more on contextual coherence thus:

> The problems which people construct from their experiences do not easily map on to existing scientific and pedagogical organisations of knowledge. What is needed in solving a technological problem may have to be drawn from diverse areas of academic science at different levels of abstraction then synthesised into an effective instrumentality for the task at hand….. Solving technological problems means building back into the situation all the

complexities of real life, reversing the process of reductionism by recontextualising knowledge. (Layton et al., 1993: 58-59)

Problem-based learning and assessment techniques and integrated tasks, and, to a lesser extent personal development plans, are teaching interventions designed to draw knowledge from different subjects, with due regard to the knowledge bases of these subjects, so that they may be 'synthesised into an effective instrumentality for the task at hand'.

Problem-based learning(PBL)

In problem-based learning, academics and work practitioners (ideally) plan a series of problem events which draw out aspects of subject knowledge so that they are orientated towards solving real problems. Students work in groups with a mentor who guides them through the various steps. The problems are typically staged, beginning with an outline of the problem for which students must supply a hypothesis, followed by progressively more information with which they are required to do more in-depth analysis. Traditionally, PBL is seen as a way of better teaching subject knowledge through providing authentic tasks (Duch, 1996; Schmidt, 1983).

The developing problem situation here is the device which articulates between work and academic knowledge, enabling the choosing of subject elements and bringing in ways of doing and thinking in the field. For example, in Medicine, students start with a brief summary of a patient and follow this with a history taking and then physical examination, which are normal procedural steps followed in the profession.

Integrated projects (IP)

In university of technology departments, subjects are traditionally taught and assessed separately and together constitute an undergraduate programme. The alternative is to provide for an additional integrated task which cuts across subject boundaries. Integrated projects are like PBL exercises but tend to be larger in scope and happen alongside or after subject teaching, rather than constituting the whole curriculum.

The design group typically consists of lecturers from different disciplines who would import perceived work-related problems into the academy in order to design the integrated task. Students are required to work co-operatively on the task (Breslow, Garraway, Winberg et al., 2005).

The intention of IPs is to better prepare students to use subject knowledge in the workplace, as well as to enhance more meaningful learning and in so doing promote a sense of developing professional identity.

Personal development plans (PDPs)

As with PBL, the PDP is a stimulus and articulating device between academic subjects and the professional world. A personal development plan is a tool to enable students to track their own achievements and weaknesses (Haigh, 2008). One form of PDP has a set of competencies designed by lecturers in a particular field which students match themselves to through guided analysis of their current abilities. They are required to identify gaps and a plan of action to deal with these gaps. The result will be a portfolio of evidence showing that the student has achieved these competencies (Jackson and Ward, 2004).

The PDP can be projective for the workplace such that the student exits university with a list of competencies and supportive evidence, or introjective where they are used as a metacognitive tool to enhance academic learning. PDP may also be used to create an awareness of the students' identity as a 'becoming' professional which can span the idea of exit competencies and learning to learn. In the transcript based on a PDP in Graphic Design that is given in the next section, this stimulus for understanding work and developing professional identity can clearly be seen.

Reflections on endeavours to promote vocational identity and learning

The following extracts show student voices as they reflect on their engagement with integrated projects and personal development planning. The extracts illustrate how engagement in these sorts of tasks can elicit a developing vocational identity and sense of self within the university. There is no extract on PBL as there were no overt PBL projects being conducted; PBL is, however, close to what is done in integrated projects.

The excerpts below come from an interview with a foundation student in Engineering. She has just been engaging in a group problem exercise, an integrated task, which was meant to simulate real work problems in the field. The work was originally reported on in a related project on perceptions of doing integrated tasks (Breslow, Garraway, Winberg et al, 2005).

There is evidence of her growing sense of being an engineer as she asserts her growing expertise and knowledge of the way things typically work in engineering:
> *You have to know … the materials you're going to use if it's the best materials that you have to use that … some things … that you have to add before you decide on … adapt …*

She continues to talk about herself in terms of her growing independence from her lecturer and her developing sense of how things work in world beyond the university. She also begins to hint at the sense of entering unknown territory where doubt exists:

> *[The lecturers] give us a project and we think they are all … almighty and things … they know a lot of things … so if they cannot do it … it gives you that … now … how are we supposed to do it? … you figured our this project and the lecturers didn't … but you also have this doubt … will this thing work?*

Finally she brings together this sense of doubt into what it is, in her mind, to really be an engineer:

> *You have to find out for yourself … in the project … okay … they told you to change this, but isn't there something else that needs to be changed? … they want to see if you will look at the other finer details that they haven't told you … because in industry … your boss will not tell you everything's that wrong … you have to go and find out … that that is also … they want to see your ability to see … beyond that … so I think that is actually a nice thing because if they're going to give you everything then you are not going to be the best mechanical engineer there will be … but if you want to be the best … you have to look beyond that … and that is …actually what I think a mechanical engineer needs to do…*

Also evident is that she is developing her own 'voice' to talk about doing Engineering. In Barnett's (2005, 2008) terms, the student is experiencing 'strangeness' alongside her development as a novice engineer.

The Graphic Design foundation course uses personal development plans. Here, students engage in a project to design a flier for a fictitious company. In so doing they are required to go through the stages of initial contact, proto-design and changes in response to the client. Such a design project involves them mobilising knowledge from different subject areas.

Students were also specifically asked to record what they had learnt, how they felt they were progressing as graphic designers and what they still needed to work on, in other words, to reflect on their progress in the form of a personal development plan. In the following interviews, students are discussing their experiences of reflecting on their growth as graphic designers, in the light of these-work orientated portfolios. The first extract is taken from a report of work done on PDP in foundation (Thole, Simon, Morris et al., 2008).

> *We need to do visual interpretations for clients and to speak to them. Doing the personal development plan (the reflection) is like an academic assessment but it is beneficial because we can't give visual interpretations to clients if something is not right and we are not ourselves satisfied. So learning through the personal development plan helps, it is like an assessment or way of doing to understand yourself and work better. The assessment is also unique.*

Here, the student appears to be linking some sort of developing professional identity (visual interpretations) with his learning. But he seems to go further and talk about the intersection not only between the profession and his learning, but also his growing sense of self.

The context of the last transcript is again in personal development planning in foundation Engineering. Students are reflecting on their abilities and difficulties with group work. They are reflecting with one another, in an electronic chat room.

C: I think that I am a problem solver, and I think I can identify problems (which is what chemical engineers do). But in total honesty I do not like to work in groups as I don't like relying on people, though I try my best to make it work
T: You aren't supposed to be here! You chose the wrong course. If you are doing chemical Engineering then you must be able to work in groups. So, change your attitude, brother, or your course!
D: Good reply, T now I think I can see you thinking like an engineer.
C: Yes but doing Chemical engineering is not just about working in a group.
E: Sometimes when you work in groups you get help from others
C: OK, I agree (working in groups is necessary).
Tutor: Yes, you do need to work in groups in the profession, to better solve problems. In fact there are few careers where you work alone a chemical engineer is a problem solver.

As with Graphic Design, the students, in discussing group work are also discussing what it is to be an engineer and taking on something of the identity of the profession, albeit it at an introductory level. Again, there is a merging of the students' everyday identity and the requirements of Engineering studies.

The extracts do not, nor are they intended to, show a clear link between certain forms of practice and the development of a vocational identity. What they do show is that practices such as IPs and PDPs can stimulate the development of a vocational identity, and how this identity may manifest itself through the voice of the student.

Conclusion

The development of a vocational identity within foundation students is one element of enhancing student learning, at the very least because it gives meaning to and glues together different and often disparate subject components. This vocational identity is more holistic than epistemological identity and thus has more in common with Barnett's (2008) concept of becoming a student. Vocational identity, ideally, also opens students up to the sorts of uncertainties which characterise modern workplaces. Vocational identity is also not a replacement for everyday social identity, nor an alternative to epistemological identity. Developing a vocational identity involves taking parts of these other identities and articulating them in new ways. The nature of vocational identity is not just one of technical abilities peculiar to the field but is rather about embodying what it is to think like and conduct oneself as a peripheral professional, even if this is done at an introductory level. Teaching and learning techniques such as PBL, project-based learning and personal development plans, through bringing together work practices, academic subjects and everyday, personal ways of doing, may stimulate and provide a vehicle for articulating new and old identities.

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Foundation provision in South African Higher Education: A social justice perspective

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Introduction and purpose

Foundation (or 'extended curriculum') Programmes, generally aimed at widening access and success in Higher Education (Boughey 2007), are now a common aspect of most South African Higher Education institutions - both 'traditional' Universities and Universities of Technology. These programmes are often financially supported by government grants in order to help achieve the current social imperatives of equity, transformation, skills development and economic empowerment. An important question is whether, in fact, these programmes are achieving their objectives, particularly when viewed through the perspective of social justice, - which, I suggest, must be taken into account when assessing the effectiveness of Foundation Programmes. This is not to detract from the necessary 'epistemological' access (Morrow, 1994), but South Africa is still a country with extremely high inequalities. Currently, South Africa has the biggest gap between the rich and the poor - having 'overtaken' Brazil - in spite of 15 years of initiatives aimed at addressing inequities[6]. In this paper, I contextualize the goal of Foundation provision with a historical account of the social agenda that have previously informed interventions aimed at access and success in South African Higher Education. In my discussion, I expound on several aspects of social justice that Foundation Programmes should be considering.

A historical view of 'foundation' provision

Concerns about access and low throughput rates in South African Universities are not new, although the social agenda informing those concerns have changed since the 1990s. As far back as the 1930s, the Ministry of Education at the time commissioned a study to examine the throughput rates of 8,000 white students admitted into South African Universities, there were similar studies in the 1950s and the 1960s (as reported in Akoojee and Nkomo, 2007). All of these studies pointed to undesirably low throughput rates. For example, a 1963 study showed that only 55% of students admitted into the eight South African residential Universities succeeded in obtaining a first degree (Malherbe, 1977). Furthermore, the fact that about 49% of those dropping out were (white) men was described as a "national disaster that needed to be addressed urgently, lest familiarity of the situation bred its acceptance" (Malherbe, 1977:487).

Owing to the government social agenda at the time of the above studies, the official approach to stemming the low throughput rates was one of widening access to Universities, in order that the absolute number of successful graduates could be increased. In opposing other approaches such as the possibility of tightened admission criteria, the then National Education Advisory Council submitted that by "putting up the standards, potentially good White university material might be excluded from university training and that thereby the much-needed trained manpower in the country might be limited" (Malherbe, 1977:495). In response to this, an 'open admissions' policy was implemented, and the result was an exponential growth in both the number of University students and real expenditure on Universities for white students (Fedderke *et al*., 2003). However, despite widened access and increased expenditure, the throughput rates still remained low, and there were various proposals to solve the problem of white attrition in Universities, including the establishment

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[6] http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/Content.aspx?id=83913# (Accessed October 2009)

of a 'foundation' or 'basic' year for all students. The aim of this was to enable the student to be "in a better position to decide in what direction his *metier* lies than under the present conditions where he is rather abruptly translated from school into a different and strange world of academic methods and objectives" (Malherbe, 1977:492).

Although this proposal for a 'foundation' or 'basic' year was never implemented, it is comparable to the rationale for the current establishment of Foundation Programmes in the country, with the key difference being that the social agenda for the 'foundation' year proposed in the 1960s was the advancement of one section of the population, while today's Foundation Programmes form part of a new social justice agenda – one that strongly came to the fore in many liberal Universities in the early 1990s, around the time of the legislative end of Apartheid. The history and format of these post-1990 programmes has been reviewed by Boughey (2005b).

General scope of social justice

The scope of social justice is broad, but it generally revolves around the application of the concept of justice on a social scale, and seeks to ensure that everyone has equal rights and opportunities (Miller, 1999). In South Africa, the policy of apartheid actively entrenched inequalities, and the advent of democracy provided a platform for the achievement of social justice. To that end, political justice is generally considered to have been achieved and, in terms of other aspects of social justice, the country's constitution has enshrined everyone's right to human dignity, equity, and freedom to participate in all of the political, socio-economic and cultural spheres of society. However, these constitutional provisions remain largely unmet for the poor and for many of those who had been marginalised by apartheid[7]. The motivation behind Foundation Programmes in Higher Education (HE) is that they are meant to play an important role in advancing access, equity, and success in HE. In order to more effectively contribute to this facet of social justice, a number of considerations, which Foundation Programmes must take into account, are outlined below.

Equal opportunity

A key question for many Foundation Programmes is: who *deserves* to be offered a place in these programmes – is it the 'economically disadvantaged', the 'educationally disadvantaged', the 'educationally under-prepared', or should *all* school leavers be treated *equally*? Since, by its very nature, social justice is redistributive, and redistribution is necessary only if there is a shortage of the resources in question, the question really is: who has the right to access the limited resources available for Foundation Programmes?

In answering the above question, it is necessary to consider what the intended objective of providing 'just' access to limited educational resources is. Generally, justice can be measured by equality of outcomes – in other words, *just outcomes* according to Miller's (1999) redistributive justice theory. However, in considering human agency in achieving those outcomes, as outlined in the Capability approach to social justice (Sen, 1990), it becomes clear that the initial conditions under which people find themselves, and how those conditions constrain the ability to achieve *just* outcomes needs to be taken into account. Young (1990:16) argues that "social justice that recognizes human agency, and so gives primacy to *doing* rather than to *having*, must start with an account of social injustice.... [and] the concept of domination and oppression, rather than simply the concept of distribution, should be the starting point for a conception of social justice".

Given South Africa's Apartheid history, oppression (in its traditional usage) has been a feature of the social landscape for many years. However, a more modern understanding of oppression also refers to

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[7] http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=848&Itemid=36

systemic constraints on groups. This could be caused through any of five faces: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence (Young, 1990) – all of which impede people's capacity for agency. I consider two of these faces (marginalisation and powerlessness), which are salient in present-day South Africa, and which should be considered in the design and implementation of Foundation Programmes.

Marginalization

Marginalisation generally refers to people or groups that the labour market will not (or cannot) use. Such people lack the skills or education needed for employment, and the material deprivation that accompanies marginalization often means that the people do not have the capacity to move out of their situation, and are therefore trapped in a cycle of marginalization. In the South African Higher Education context, 'marginalized' groups would include those who are disadvantaged by the school education available to them: schooling of such poor quality that it precludes the students from achieving the performance normally required for entry into Higher Education.

The current practice of many Foundation Programmes aiming to address educational 'disadvantage' is to focus on socio-economic status (rather than on race, as was almost exclusively the case in the 1990s [Boughey, 2005b]) for admission. That notwithstanding, the reality of South Africa is that any definition of disadvantage correlates well with race. In this regard, it is instructive that, whereas participation rates in Higher Education (total enrolment as percentage of the 20-24 age-group) is 16% for South Africa, the rate is 5 times higher for the white sector of the population (60%) than for the Black and Coloured sectors (both 12%), as indicated in Table 1. Therefore, the current situation is one in which the historically underprivileged sector of the population is still marginalized in Higher Education. If Foundation Programmes are to contribute meaningfully to the agenda of social justice, they *must* have mechanisms for helping 'marginalised' groups. Such mechanisms do not necessarily have to be based on race (for example, an index of school disadvantage, such as that developed by the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Education Department, can be used is already and widely used in countries such as New Zealand can be used as a guide for admission, but they will still contribute to the achievement of racial equity in Higher Education. Having no mechanism for addressing such inequalities (in Higher Education) risks excluding people who are already marginalized, and hence the entrenchment of social injustice.

Population group	Gross participation rates: Total enrolment in 2005 as percentage of 20-24 age-group
Overall	16%
White	60%
Indian	51%
Coloured	12%
Black	12%

Table 1: Gross participation rates in Higher Education in South Africa (Source: Scott *et al*., 2007).

Powerlessness

In her description of powerlessness, Young (1990:57) contrasts the lives of working professionals with those of non-professionals, and argues that powerlessness is the lack of the "authority, status, and sense of self that professionals tend to have". Given that most professionals need to acquire specialized knowledge, usually with a Higher Education qualification, the majority of South African youth could be said to be in a relatively powerless state, given the low participation rates in Higher

Education (Table 1). Furthermore, those young South Africans who get into Higher Education fare generally poorly, with a majority leaving without any qualification. This is typified by results showing that 40% of all students joining South African Universities drop out in their first year (Scott *et al*., 2007), and that typically only 30% of the cohorts registered for 3-year programmes in Universities of Technology graduate within 5 years (Table 2). It is noteworthy that the overall graduation rates are at about same the level as they were in the 1950s and 60s (indicated above), which implies that the country's Higher Education system still faces a decades-long challenge of not being easily navigable by the youth. Significant, too, is the finding that the graduation rate for Black students was less than half of that for White students for all fields of study (Scott *et al*., 2007). These data indicate that the current HE system works well for only a small portion of the youth, with the situation being worse for poorer sectors,, and that maintenance of the *status quo* will perpetuate powerlessness of the majority of youth. Thus, Foundation Programmes must be designed to address low HE participation rates and low throughput rates, if they are to help address the injustice of the current HE system.

CESM category	Black	White	Ratio w/b
04: Business Management	31%	44%	1.4
06: Computer Science	33%	43%	1.3
08: Engineering	16%	28%	1.8
21: Social Services/ Public Administration	29%	23%	0.8

Table 2: Graduation rates of students admitted to South African Universities of Technology (previously Technikons) in the year 2000, after 5 years of study. The regulation time for the qualifications is 3 years (Source: Scott *et al*., 2007).

The notion of Capability and exclusion

Although the South African constitution upholds many rights for everyone in the country, these rights are not necessarily accessible to all. This is particularly clear when separating the so-called 'aggregated' rights (for example, the right of *everyone* to basic education) and the *individual's* capability to access those rights. This so-called Capability approach to social justice (Sen, 1990) provides a further tool to gauge the contribution of Foundation programmes to social justice. In this regard, even though a key aspect of social justice in Education (and a cornerstone for many Foundation Programmes), is inclusivity, it is quite possible that the 'normal' practices in Higher Education institutions or Foundation programmes, are in themselves excluding, because they hinder the capability of individual students to access HE.

While taking into account the fact that Foundation Programmes in universities are not autonomous but function within the processes, procedures and governance of the universities, it is worth highlighting some 'institutional' practices that impact on the effectiveness of Foundation programmes. The granting, disbursement and administration of financial assistance (from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS) constitute such an example. Personal experience has shown that there are many deserving students who are unable to join Foundation Programmes because they cannot afford the fees required to 'accept' a place at University (R500 in some cases,), or cannot pay the up-front registration fees required (R2 500 in some cases) before they can even apply for Financial Aid (only registered students may apply for Financial Aid). Furthermore, when applying for Financial Aid, the students are required by many institutions to furnish, within a very short period, *original* copies of documents such as payslips and affidavits from their parents or guardians. Yet, students who join city Universities from distant rural areas have no chance of obtaining these documents in time for the application for Financial Aid. In addition, some students may come from cultures where the definition of 'family' and relationships therein, do not fit the

dominant understanding (generally Western) of the requirements for the award of Financial Aid. Thus, for example, a family of two siblings and six live-in cousins is effectively a family of eight siblings in the understanding of many students' cultures, but the 'extra' six children in the family are not taken into consideration during the 'means' *assessment* for Financial Aid. Deserving students can therefore possibly fail to get Financial Aid because their situation precludes them from exercising capability to access this aid. In what may be considered rather extreme, the regulations of some Universities do not even allow Foundation students to receive Financial Aid – effectively denying entry to many Foundation students, who are otherwise 'welcome' at the universities. Yet, it is worth noting that South African universities returned R40 million, unspent, to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in the 2008 Financial Year (Government Communication and Information System, 2009)!

This illustrates how normal, standard practices in universities can, in fact, be argued to run against the grain of social justice, and therefore it may be worth while for Foundation Programmes to consider measures that can alleviate the difficulties presented by the 'normal' university procedures. For example, as a short-term solution to the Financial Aid problem outlined above, Foundation Programmes could have initiatives in which prospective Foundation students are expeditiously assessed for financial need, and if the students qualify for Financial Aid but are unable to raise the funds required for registration, the Foundation Programmes could pay for the students' registration (or, if necessary, get the registration fees refunded once the Financial Aid funds are paid to the students' fee accounts at the university). Such an intervention would require prior fund-raising by the Foundation Programmes, but is feasible and has been successfully applied (see Kioko, 2009). In the long term, however, Foundation Programmes should be advocating for adjustments in those institutional practices that hamper accessibility to *individual* students.

Although some impediments to individual student access to HE are located in the parent universities of Foundation Programmes, there are those which lie within the Programmes themselves, and can therefore be addressed more readily in the design of the Programme curricula. Key among such Programme-level issues is epistemological access, which is described by Jansen (2001:1) as "access to knowledge – its various forms, how it is organised, its value bases, it politics and its power". Thus, it is necessary to interrogate what is prized as 'knowledge' and whether this acknowledges and affirms the individual and social realities of the students admitted into Foundation Programmes. Furthermore, since the South African society is unequal in many respects (for example, in terms of access to resources and opportunities), the use of classroom practices which are based on the hierarchical transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student, and in which learner inquiry and construction of meaning are not valued, gives students no opportunity to challenge the unequal *status quo*, and is therefore epistemologically oppressive (Povey, 2002).

Strategies that can be used to enhance epistemological access include a constructivist approach to teaching (see, for example, Tsai, 2000; Povey, 2002; Yerrick *et al.*, 1998), and making overt the 'rules and conventions' of what counts as knowledge in the various subjects (Boughey, 2002; Morrow, 1993). In this regard, the value of generic 'skills' courses in Foundation Programmes is questionable, as the nature of knowledge for a particular subjects is best explored using the actual academic content of the subject (Boughey, 2005a). On the other hand, if the content is too heavy, the students have no chance to truly engage with it, as heavy workload have been positively correlated to 'surface' learning approaches (Kember, 2004) and to student stress (Kember and Leung, 1998).

An additional consideration when designing a Foundation curriculum that facilitates epistemological access is that one's view of knowledge often influences one's learning styles (Tsai, 2000) and pedagogical practices (Povey, 2002). Because of the diversity of students and teaching staff in terms

of their views of knowledge – ranging from the positivist and empiricist to those with constructivist epistemologies – designing of appropriate curricula has to be necessarily responsive and well-led. Currently, however, many Foundation Programmes are handicapped in the provision of dynamic curricula because the Foundation teaching staff in many Universities are employed on an *ad hoc* basis, without the support or expectation of long-term career security or development. Moreover, in many instances, the Foundation staff members are themselves novices in the subjects they are employed to teach and may simply not be equipped to design curricula or teach in ways that epistemologically empower students. To counter this, Foundation Programmes should, in fact, be taught by some of the best and most experienced staff members in the discipline.

Internal exclusion
Foundation Programmes generally aim to increase access to Higher Education for school-leavers in the country, and there is abundant political and legislative support for such increased access - with the demise of policies for 'external' exclusion and the dawn of a liberal constitutional democracy in the country. However, the communities from which many Foundation students come may still remain 'marginalized', silenced, or ignored by the "dominant terms of discourse and privileged styles of action and expression" (Pendlebury and Enslin, 2004:37) found in many Universities. While internal exclusion is undesirable educationally, it also thwarts the development of other characteristics such as openness and reciprocity, which are socially desirable and crucial for democratic participation (Enslin *et al*., 2001).

An important consideration for Foundation Programmes, is whether the students feel internally excluded or stigmatized on the basis of the prevalent University culture, language, race, religion, and so on. In instances where Foundation Programmes are reserved for Black students, there may be a tacit implication that Black students are, by nature, deficient in their ability to succeed at University, and therefore in need of special measures to 'right' them. This easily creates a feeling of otherness and inadequacy in Foundation students.

University students *not* admitted into the Foundation Programmes are referred to as 'mainstream'. In itself, this labelling may have the effect of implying that there is a deficiency in Foundation students – they are not 'mainstream'. Being *not* mainstream has attendant social constructs, which tend to ignore the experiences, values and cultures of differently-situated people. I have personally experienced the concerns raised by Foundation students being disregarded by some 'mainstream' staff in various Universities, with comments such as: "*such [Foundation] students are weak anyway, and therefore will find any excuse to justify their weakness*", and "*what is the point of giving someone a leg-up when they have no legs at all*?". These comments were made in the context of discussions regarding pass rates, and whether the pass rates attained by Foundation students cannot be improved by the lecturers' own adjustment and responsiveness to the learning needs of different students.

Internal exclusion in Foundation Programmes might not be restricted to students since, as mentioned above, Foundation staff in many Universities are employed on a temporary basis, and possibly considered as not part of the 'core' or 'mainstream' staff. Such staff would suffer the same internal exclusion as students.

## To each according to his or her *Needs*

Even when every Foundation student has the capability to access the programmes offered and feels no internal exclusion, a further necessary consideration of social justice is *need*. Although different students will have different needs that compete with each other, according to Miller (1999), it is

'intrinsic needs' (what is minimally necessary to prevent harm to a person) which are important in social justice. In this respect, biological harm is most easily discerned and addressed, but the *needs* advanced by Miller include the "full range of resources for each person in a community to live a normal human life" Miller (1999:210). For students, this should include being able to participate in the University public space without shame or disgrace, so that participation in 'normal' University activities (including recreation and politics) is not impeded. Such impediment can lead to internal exclusion, as was demonstrated in a study into why parents in a poor neighbourhood in Freedom Park, in Rustenburg, did not take their children to school (Pendelbury and Enslin, 2004). According to the parents, "our poverty is our shame.... we cannot disgrace our children by sending them [to school] without school fees and uniforms" (Pendelbury and Enslin, 2004:35.

In the design and execution of Foundation Programmes, it is important to consider to what extent the students' *needs* can be met – from biological needs (a study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal that showed that Foundation students were more vulnerable to food insecurity than were 'mainstream' students [Munro, 2008] is a case in point), to other needs that affect the students' full participation in University life.

Foundation provision is everyone's business

In the sections above, I have provided just a number of ways in which students may be (or may feel) excluded by their experiences in Foundation Programmes, especially if the design of the programmes has not taken sufficient regard of social justice principles. Since education can serve as a means of achieving social justice in other spheres, exclusion from education is associated with exclusion from other areas of social development. This association can be starkly illustrated by the link between participation and success rates in Higher Education on one hand, and contribution to the scientific knowledge economy (as indicated by productivity of publications) on the other. A comparison of Table 1 (above) and Figure 1 (below), shows that the population segment with the lowest participation in Higher Education in South Africa (Black), makes a grossly disproportionately small contribution to the scientific output, while the White population (less than 10% of the country's population) accounts for 70% of the scientific output. Clearly, this situation cannot make for a sustainable, progressive nation.
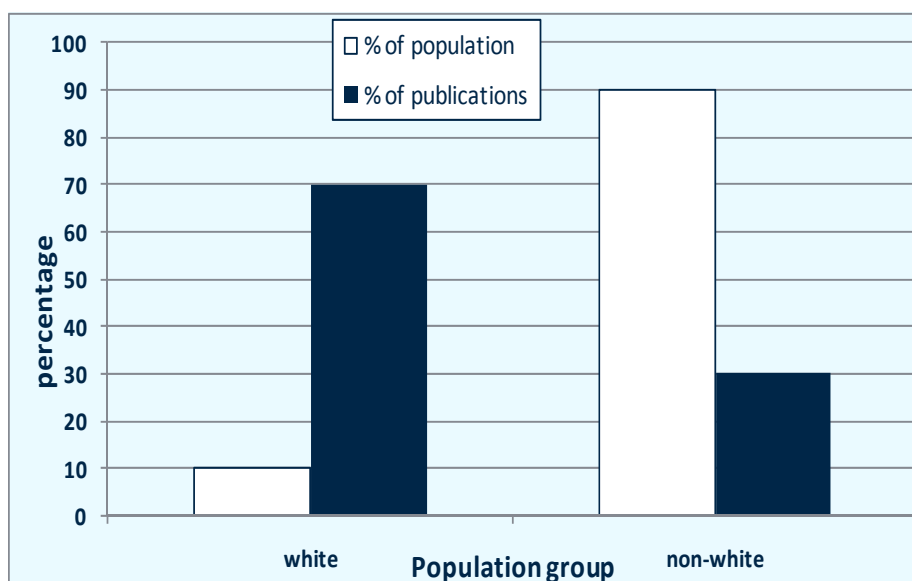
Figure 1: Production of Scientific publications by different population groups in South Africa (Source: Research and Developoment Survey, Department of Science and Technology, 2003/4).

While universities in general, and Foundation Programmes in particular, continue to facilitate the achievement of equity of access to HE, it is concerning that recent studies have shown that, despite improved access to HE since 1994, race now plays a steeply increased role in the *returns to education* (i.e. the extent to which higher education translates to increased wages) and it (race) accounts for 40% of the wage differential between White (higher wages) and Black (lower wages) South Africans (Keswell, 2004). Low returns to education constrain individual agency in acquiring Higher Education, and this might lead to an incentive structure facing 'marginalised' South Africans that is at odds with the further acquisition of schooling. This would impact negatively on the advances made in towards achieving equity of access to HE, and is a demonstration that there are 'downstream' societal factors (such as whether it 'pays' to acquire HE), that impact on the effectiveness of Foundation Programmes.

Foundation Programmes undoubtedly facilitate the success of students who may otherwise not have succeeded (Colborn, 2009, Kioko *et al.*, 2009), but it has been suggested that the problems experienced by many students, and which lead to academic exclusion, can be attributed to the Universities and curricula themselves (Scott *et al*., 2007). Therefore, if Foundation Programmes focus only on the students, rather than the educational structure itself, they will merely provide the student access to the dominant cultural capital (see, for example, Carrim, 1994) and will only serve to preserve the *status quo*. Mehl (1988:17) puts it thus:

> "The questions which are being addressed have changed from how the 'underdeveloped' are 'developed', to examining the basic underpinning of the institutions themselves. In the process it is becoming clearer that in relation to the realities of present-day South Africa it is not simply a case of students carrying various educational deficits onto the campus with then because of the socio-economic and political dispensation, but rather a case of the universities themselves, as represented by academic and administrative staff, being deficient, if the vision of a non-racial, democratic South Africa is to be realized".

In conclusion, many social gains have been achieved in post-apartheid South Africa, and these include well-documented efforts to widen access to University education to previously marginalized sectors of the population. However, the South African society remains unequal in many aspects, and social justice remains an important social aspiration. In the HE sector, Foundation Programmes can make an important contribution towards social justice within both the HE sector and, as a corollary, the wiser society; but for that to happen, the design and operation of these Programmes must purposefully address issues of social justice. On their own, though, Foundation Programmes will inevitably have less impact than can be achieved, and the parent universities must therefore embrace the issues addressed by Foundation Programmes and treat them as institutional issues. Foundation provision is everyone's business.

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